

# Father Matters: Why Dads are Important for Their Children



*Chuck Smith, Family Studies Specialist*

Although fathers have become more involved with their families beyond the role of breadwinner, their cultural value may still be questioned. Advances in bioscience and reproductive technology make it possible for a woman to become a mother without a father in a child's life. A gradual cultural shift of permissiveness toward single parenting has given both women and men the impression that fathers don't really matter. Divorce has become a tool for achieving "self-actualization."

As a result, only about 50 percent of children today will spend their entire childhood in an intact family. According to a report based on the the 2004 U.S. Census, an estimated 23.6 million children (32.3 percent) live absent from their biological father. (The research on fathering that is the foundation for this fact sheet assumes the relationship is biological unless otherwise stated.)

Ron Klinger states in his article "Father Involvement Reduces School Violence," published by the Center for Successful Fathering ([www.fathering.org](http://www.fathering.org)), the evidence indicates those male students without involved fathers:

- represent 75 percent of all adolescents and teenagers seen by the justices of the peace;



- are more than twice as likely to fail course work and repeat a grade;
- are six to 11 times more likely to be suspended for violent behavior;
- represent three of four deaths by suicide;
- are anxious, hostile, and more likely to be rejected by peers;
- represent 80 percent of males treated in psychiatric hospitals.

The impact of father loss has an effect on daughters as well as sons.

According to research by the U.S. Department of Health and Human



Services, fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of school.

A Bureau of Justice Statistics study of 13,986 women in prison showed that more than half grew up without their fathers. Forty-two percent grew up in a single-mother household, and 16 percent lived with neither parent.

A 1994 report published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* found that adolescent females between the ages of 15 and 19 reared in homes without fathers are significantly more likely to engage in premarital sex than those reared in homes with both a mother and father.

## Father Benefits

Not all men make good fathers. Children can be better off without disinterested or abusive men of any kind in their lives. When children are

separated from fathers, there is a loss and a cost. Loving father figures such as stepfathers or grandfathers can offset this cost. But they cannot replace biological fathers. A child's mother cannot replace the father. Children need the balance of a mother and a father. Is America losing its balance?

What do involved fathers do?

- They support the child's mother and share the challenging workload of raising children.
- They provide financial support to provide the resources the mother and children need.

As important as these contributions are, anyone can make them. Although it may not seem politically correct, biology *does* matter. The deep emotional attachment of a biological parental connection strengthens the

relationship and provides stability and security that enables children to succeed in a challenging world.

Fathers establish a profound relationship with their children that nurtures them emotionally and physically. No one else, regardless of how noble their intentions or how wonderful they might be, can replace a child's father. Grandfathers can come close, but even they cannot fill the gap completely. Having a mother *and* father responsible for bringing them into the world is life affirming.

## Call to Action

Here are seven things you can consider to support fathers in your community.

1. Understand fathers are important but recognize and affirm the heroic efforts of mothers and others who seek to bring a nurturing male influence into the lives of children whose fathers are absent.
2. Speak up about the importance of biological fathers and encourage dads to become *Championship Fathers* at [www.fathers.com](http://www.fathers.com). This movement is characterized by men who commit to fulfilling their commitment to *love* their children, *coach* their children, *model* for their children, *encourage* other children, and *enlist* other dads to join the team.
3. Promote responsible fatherhood in your community. Young unmarried men who may be sexually active should understand the lifetime distress their absence will have on children who might be conceived.
4. Become aware of how fathers are portrayed in the media. How would you grade the impression the media give young people about what it means to be a father?
5. Listen to *About Dads Radio*, a podcast series for both men and women about the importance of fathers at [www.aboutdadsradio.com](http://www.aboutdadsradio.com).
6. Join with others in your community to offer events that celebrate fathers. The National Center for Fathering, for example, holds "Father-Daughter Summits" throughout the country.
7. Visit five great websites and learn more about fathers:
  - [www.ksfatherhood.org](http://www.ksfatherhood.org)
  - [www.fathers.com](http://www.fathers.com)
  - [www.fathering.org](http://www.fathering.org)
  - [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org)
  - [www.fatherhood.gov](http://www.fatherhood.gov)

## Author

Charles A. Smith, Ph.D.  
Professor, School of Family Studies  
and Human Services  
Kansas State University  
[casmith@ksu.edu](mailto:casmith@ksu.edu)



Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.

Publications from Kansas State University are available on the World Wide Web at: [www.ksre.ksu.edu](http://www.ksre.ksu.edu)

Publications are reviewed or revised annually by appropriate faculty to reflect current research and practice. Date shown is that of publication or last revision.

Contents of this publication may be freely reproduced for educational purposes. All other rights reserved.

In each case, credit Chuck Smith, *Father Matters: Why Dads are Important to Their Children, Fact Sheet*, Kansas State University, July 2010.

**Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service**

**MF2923**

**July 2010**